2 dozen “CIA Democrats” in US House of Representatives: A balance sheet of the 2026 election

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The results of the 2026 midterm elections confirm the analysis made by the WSWS that the Democratic Party is moving drastically to the right, even though its electoral victory November 3 was due to a dramatic shift to the left among workers and youth.

Millions opposed the fascist warmongering and authoritarianism of the Trump administration. But within the framework of the corporate-controlled two-party system, their only “realistic” alternative, according to the corporate media, the union leaders and pseudo-left organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America, was to vote for the Democrats.

These votes, however, did not go to genuine opponents of Trump and the Republicans, but to collaborators and prospective partners of Trump in his militarism and racist nationalism towards the rest of the world, and his vicious attacks on the working class at home.

Even if one were to accept the good intentions of the handful of “lefts” and self-proclaimed “democratic socialists” elected November 3 (and no one should), they are vastly outnumbered by an increasingly influential group of former military-intelligence operatives who have moved directly from the national-security apparatus into Congress.

The origin of the CIA Democrats

The WSWS first identified this faction as the “CIA Democrats” in 2018, when more than 50 sought Democratic congressional nominations, with 30 winning primary contests and 11 entering the House as new members.

The two corporate-controlled parties that share political power in the United States uphold the military-intelligence apparatus that defends the capitalist system and the global interests of American imperialism. In that sense, *all* Democratic politicians are “CIA Democrats,” from the most openly militarist to fake “lefts” like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Zohran Mamdani, just as their Republican counterparts could all be termed “CIA Republicans.”

But the purpose of this label is to highlight a new phenomenon in American politics: the direct transfer of a layer of military-intelligence operatives from the state apparatus, via the Democratic Party, to high-level positions in the legislative branch. Most of these congressional candidates came from the military itself, by far the largest section of that apparatus. Others came from civilian national-security posts in the White House and State Department.

Two of those elected in 2018, Elissa Slotkin in Michigan and Abigail Spanberger in Virginia, had been actual CIA agents. They did not conceal their past affiliation with an agency synonymous all over the world with torture, murder and conspiracies against democratic rights. Rather, they boasted of it as their main credential to become one of the 435 members of the House of Representatives. Slotkin is now a US senator from Michigan and will become its senior senator in January, while Spanberger is governor of Virginia, chief executive in the state where both CIA headquarters and the Pentagon are located.

Democratic candidates who had worked in military intelligence, commanded combat units and Special Forces operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, or plotted imperialist war crimes in the White House, State Department and Pentagon were similarly open about their past roles.

None of the military-intelligence agencies, usually so concerned with suppressing any information about their “sources and methods,” let alone the identity of their agents, made any objection to this public flaunting of involvement in secret operations. That fact alone suggests that the agencies themselves had given their approval to what amounted to a thinly disguised intervention into the Democratic Party and Congress.

A new influx from the military in 2026

Since 2018, there has been some reshuffling among the CIA Democrats, with two moving up to Senate seats (in Michigan and New Jersey) and three winning statewide office (in New Jersey, Virginia and North Carolina). A few were defeated for reelection, but there were new recruits with similar backgrounds. The overall size of the military-intelligence faction in the House remained at roughly a dozen over four election cycles.

In 2026, as we explained in a series of articles published before the election, there was a new and even larger influx of CIA Democrats into the midterm election campaign, with the Democratic Party nominating a staggering 68 candidates drawn from the military-intelligence apparatus to seats in the House of Representatives, including incumbents seeking reelection.

With all races involving these candidates now decided, the size of the CIA Democrat faction in Congress has more than doubled, to 24. All 11 incumbents were reelected, while 13 new members will take their seats on January 3, 2027.

On November 11, Veterans Day, the group staged its first public event, on the steps of the Capitol, denouncing Trump’s Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and calling for his removal. It was organized by the Democratic Veterans Caucus, a House faction established in June 2025 that brings together a handful of older Democratic veterans with most of those elected since 2018.

Representative Ted Lieu (CA-36) co-chairs the group and provides a

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direct pipeline to the House Democratic leadership, as he is the fifth-ranking Democrat, incoming chair of the House Democratic Caucus. His co-chairs in the veterans caucus are Pat Ryan (NY-18) and Chris Deluzio (PA-17), both first elected in 2022. The three co-chairs conveniently represent the three main branches of the military, with Ryan a former Army intelligence officer, Deluzio a former Navy surface warfare officer, and Lieu a former Air Force judge-advocate general (JAG), with 22 years in the Reserves following four years on active duty.

The general tenor of the remarks can be gauged by the comments of two of the more than a dozen speakers. Representative-elect Cait Conley of New York struck an unabashed patriotic note, declaring, "America is the home of the brave. Over the last 20 years, I spent in uniform from the hallowed halls of West Point to six tours overseas combat like Iraq and Afghanistan, protecting this country."

This was combined with repeated attacks on Hegseth, not Trump, as when Representative Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania, reelected to a fifth term, said, "Secretary Hegseth's leadership weakened and isolated our country. It's caused allies to lose faith in us. It's deprived our service members of qualified leadership and subjected all of us to the consequences of this unlawful war [Iran], the consequences that many [of] my colleagues are highlighting."

The influx of the past eight years has significantly altered the balance between the two capitalist parties, in terms of the influence of the military within them. For decades, at least since the 1990s, a large majority of military veterans in the House of Representatives were Republicans. In the 120th Congress, there will be 30 Democrats (including a half-dozen older veterans) and 38 Republicans with military service. At least 20 Republican veterans retired rather than seek reelection.

What follows is a listing of the 24 incoming military-intelligence Democrats, organized geographically across the four main regions of the United States. (A note of apology to readers: the photos used come from the congressional or election websites of the CIA Democrats. Hence the array of smiling, friendly faces on people who, collectively and in some cases individually, are responsible for thousands, even tens of thousands of deaths.)

Northeast states (Maine to Maryland)

Maggie Goodlander (NH-2), first elected in 2024. A lawyer who worked as a national-security aide to warhawk senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman, she was also a military-intelligence officer in the Navy Reserve. In 2015, she married Jake Sullivan, then the top national-security aide to Hillary Clinton. In 2021, Sullivan became President Joe Biden's national security adviser, while Goodlander served as in-house counsel to Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Jake Auchincloss (MA-4), first elected in 2020, when he won a narrow victory in a nine-candidate primary in a heavily Democratic district in the Boston suburbs. A captain in the Marine Corps who led patrols in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, Auchincloss later led an elite reconnaissance force in anti-drug operations in Panama. He comes from a prominent Massachusetts family: his grand-uncle, McGeorge Bundy, was national security adviser to President Lyndon Johnson and one of the chief architects of the Vietnam War.

Luke Bronin (CT-1), newly elected, ousted 14-term incumbent John Larson in the Democratic primary, then easily won the general election. Bronin was a Navy Reserve intelligence officer, deployed to Kabul during the war in Afghanistan, then serving in the Obama administration as deputy assistant secretary for terrorist financing and financial crimes at the Treasury. He first ran for office in 2015, winning election as mayor of Hartford and serving two terms.

Cait Conley (NY-17), newly elected, defeated incumbent Republican Mike Lawler. Conley is a West Point graduate who deployed six times to Afghanistan and Iraq with the Army special forces. She spent 16 years in the Army, reaching the rank of major, before going to work at the National Security Council in the Biden White House as a director for counterterrorism, and then the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

Pat Ryan (NY-18), first elected in 2022. Ryan is a West Point graduate with two tours of duty in Iraq, including as intelligence officer for a battalion of 1,000 soldiers fighting in the Mosul area, reaching the rank of captain. He lost his first bid for office, in a primary contest for the congressional seat in 2018, then ran for and won the position of chief executive of Ulster County. When the congressional seat became vacant again in 2022, with the appointment of Representative Antonio Delgado as lieutenant governor of New York, Ryan ran again and won.

Rebecca Bennett (NJ-7), newly elected, defeating two-term Republican incumbent Tom Kean Jr., Bennett spent 15 years in the Navy as a helicopter pilot, test pilot and lieutenant commander, one of the first women to take that role. She deployed to the Middle East as part of a naval task force headed by the carrier USS Nimitz, and flew missions through the Strait of Hormuz. After leaving active duty in 2019, she moved to New Jersey and held corporate positions with a series of healthcare companies.

Adam Hamawy (NJ-12), newly elected, won a 13-candidate primary to succeed retiring Democratic incumbent Bonnie Watson Coleman in this Trenton-based district. He was backed in the primary by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. An Egyptian American born in Egypt and raised in New Jersey, he went to medical school on an ROTC scholarship and served eight years as an Army surgeon, from 2003-2011, including a nine-month deployment to Baghdad, leaving the military as a lieutenant-colonel. Hamawy had high-level support within the Democratic leadership, particularly from Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-Illinois), whose life he saved in Iraq after her military helicopter was shot down.

Chrissy Houlahan (PA-6), first elected in 2018, winning the seat in the Philadelphia suburbs left vacant by the retirement of Republican Ryan Costello. Houlahan went to Stanford on an Air Force ROTC scholarship to study industrial engineering, then was deployed to Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts where she was part of an engineering project preparing "for the aftermath of nuclear war." She left the Air Force Reserve with the rank of captain.

Chris Deluzio (PA-17), first elected in 2022, when he succeeded another CIA Democrat, Conor Lamb, who ran for US Senate and lost the nomination to John Fetterman. Deluzio graduated from the Naval Academy, deployed three times, first as a surface warfare officer, then as a civil affairs officer in Iraq. After the military, he took a law degree and worked on cybersecurity, particularly related to elections.

Midwest states (Ohio to North Dakota)

Kristina Knickerbocker (OH-10), newly elected, defeating 12-term incumbent Republican Mike Turner, former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. A 35-year-old native of southern California and graduate of USC, she was deployed to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, just outside of Dayton, as an Air Force nurse. Knickerbocker rose to the rank of major before leaving the military at the end of 2025 and announcing her candidacy for Congress.

Frederick Wellman (MO-2), newly elected, defeated incumbent Ann Wagner. Wellman is a graduate of West Point who was commissioned as

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an Army aviator and flew OH-58 scout helicopters in Operation Desert Storm, the 1990-1991 war against Iraq, and later graduated from Army Ranger school. After the 9/11 attacks, he volunteered for active duty and took part in the initial US attack on Iraq in 2003, worked at the Pentagon, then retired as a disabled veteran in 2010, with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Southern states (Virginia to Texas)

Elaine Luria (VA-2), first elected in 2018, lost her seat to Republican Jennifer Kiggans in 2022 but won it back this year. The district includes the vast Hampton Roads naval establishment, the largest concentration of US Navy personnel. Luria deployed six times to the Middle East and Western Pacific as a "nuclear-trained surface warfare officer," retiring with the rank of commander after serving as second-in-command of a guided missile cruiser and then commanding an amphibious craft unit. During her first stint in Congress, Luria became nationally known as a member of the House Select Committee which investigated the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

Eugene Vindman (VA-7), first elected in 2024, when he succeeded former CIA agent Abigail Spanberger in a district located between Richmond and the Washington D.C. suburbs. A Ukrainian-American and career Army officer, Vindman played a key role in the first impeachment of Donald Trump, when he was an ethics lawyer at the White House National Security Council and his twin brother Alexander worked there on East European affairs. He is a prominent advocate of greater US intervention in the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

Don Davis (NC-1), first elected in 2022, succeeding longtime Democratic incumbent G. K. Butterfield in a largely rural district in northeast North Carolina. A graduate of the US Air Force Academy and former operations officer—including at Andrews Air Force Base, the primary route for presidential travel—Davis began teaching "national security affairs" at East Carolina University in 1998, as an Air Force ROTC instructor while still in the service. He won a seat in the state senate in 2008, lost it in 2010 and regained it in 2012 before moving up to Congress.

Richard Ojeda (NC-9), newly elected, upset incumbent Republican Richard Hudson, who was in charge of Republican congressional election efforts nationwide but lost his own seat. Ojeda previously ran for Congress in 2018 in West Virginia and lost, before moving to the North Carolina district that includes Fort Bragg and other military facilities. He made multiple tours of duty in the US Army Airborne, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, before returning to the US and overseeing Army recruiting in West Virginia and Virginia, finally retiring as a major.

Nancy Lacore (SC-1), newly elected, winning the seat vacated by Republican Nancy Mace, covering Charleston and most of the state's Atlantic coast, home to many Navy retirees. Lacore was forced out of the Pentagon by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, after a more than three-decade career in which she rose to the rank of vice admiral, commanding 60,000 sailors and Marines in the Navy Reserve. Her campaign was largely focused on criticism of Hegseth and Trump's handling of US military forces and commanders.

Zach Dembo (KY-6), newly elected, for the seat left vacant by Republican Andy Barr, who ran for and won a Senate seat. Dembo was a judge advocate general (JAG) in the Navy, then a federal prosecutor in the Trump administration, before moving back to Kentucky to work for Democratic Governor Andy Beshear. He was again appointed a federal prosecutor under the Biden administration. He chaired the Veterans Caucus rally at the Capitol and is clearly being promoted as a leader of the much larger group of ex-military-intelligence operatives in the House.

Western states (New Mexico to Hawaii)

Eileen Laubacher (CO-4), newly elected, is the other retired admiral to win a congressional seat this year. She defeated notorious right-wing Republican incumbent Lauren Boebert in a largely rural district comprising nearly the entire eastern half of the state. A graduate of the Naval Academy, she spent seven years in naval intelligence, deployed to Afghanistan in 2009, before becoming defense attache at the US embassy in New Delhi, India. After returning to the US, she worked in the Biden White House as Senior Director for South Asia on the National Security Council.

Jessica Killin (CO-5), newly elected, defeated first-term Republican incumbent Jeff Crank in a district which includes Colorado Springs, home of the Air Force Academy, and which has never before elected a Democrat to Congress. After an ROTC scholarship to college, Killin became an Army paratrooper, rising to the level of captain, stationed overseas in military police missions in the Balkans and other European NATO operations. After leaving the military, she worked on Capitol Hill as an adviser, eventually becoming an aide to Doug Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala Harris.

Jason Crow (CO-6), first elected in 2018 in this suburban Denver district. Crow was an officer in the 82nd Airborne Division, leading a paratrooper platoon during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He then joined the Army Rangers and was deployed twice to Afghanistan as part of a Special Operations Task Force, retiring from the military as a captain. Since his election, he has become one of the most influential of the CIA Democrats in Congress, named as an impeachment manager against Trump in January 2020 by then Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

JoAnna Mendoza (AZ-6), newly elected, defeating two-term Republican incumbent Juan Ciscomani in this Tucson-based district. Mendoza enlisted in the Navy at 17, becoming a Marine Corps drill instructor and deploying to both Iraq and Afghanistan. After retiring from the military, she worked on Capitol Hill advising on veterans affairs, cashing in on these connections in her well-financed election campaign.

Gil Cisneros (CA-31), first elected in 2018, defeated in 2020, returned to office in 2024 in a neighboring district. Cisneros went to college on a Navy ROTC scholarship, then worked on supply ships for 10 years, retiring as a lieutenant commander in 2004. He was elected to Congress as a self-financing candidate, thanks to winning a $266 million lottery prize in 2010 (he took a lump-sum payout worth $90 million after taxes). After his reelection defeat, Cisneros served for two years in the Biden administration, as Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness at the Pentagon.

Derek Tran (CA-45), first elected in 2024. Son of refugees from Vietnam (his website boasts of his hatred of communism), Tran enlisted in the Army at age 18, and spent eight years, mainly at the Joint Forces Training Base Los Alamitos. He was activated for Operation Enduring Freedom (the war in Afghanistan), but his chemical warfare defense unit deployed to Fort Stewart, Georgia and did not go overseas. After leaving the military he went to law school and entered politics, first serving as an appointed city traffic commissioner, then narrowly defeating Republican incumbent Michelle Steel in a district that is heavily Asian American, including a large Vietnamese American population.

Sara Jacobs (CA-51), first elected in 2020, after losing a primary contest in 2018 in a neighboring district. Jacobs worked on countering violent extremism as a State Department contractor in the Obama administration, starting in 2014 after Hillary Clinton had left, and later

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advised Clinton's 2016 campaign. She is a granddaughter of Qualcomm billionaire Irwin Jacobs, listed as the fourth-richest capitalist in San Diego. Jacobs narrowly lost a contest for vice chair of the House Democratic Caucus, the sixth-ranking position in the leadership, earlier this month.

Some final notes

A few additional aspects should be detailed. Out of the 13 new members of Congress with military-intelligence backgrounds, 10 had high-level connections in Washington, particularly at the White House and Pentagon. They are not unknown quantities to either the Democratic congressional leadership or the top levels of the national-security apparatus.

Of the members of Congress examined above, only one, Derek Tran, is a rank-and-file soldier, leaving the military as an Army specialist, the equivalent of corporal. JoAnna Mendoza held the rank of gunnery sergeant and drill instructor in the Marines. All the other military veterans are former officers—four Navy lieutenants (the equivalent of a captain in the Army or Air Force), six captains, three majors, three lieutenant colonels, three lieutenant commanders or commanders (the Navy ranks equivalent to majors and lieutenant colonels), and two admirals.

The 24 military-intelligence Democrats represent the branches of the military in different proportions: 11 from the Navy and Marine Corps, nine from the Army, and only three from the Air Force (plus Jacobs, the lone former State Department official). Given that the Air Force is nearly as large as the Navy, though considerably smaller than the Army, the lower number likely reflects the prevailing political culture in the Air Force, particularly its officer corps, which is reputedly far more right-wing (and far more religious) than the other two main branches of the military.

Of the 68 Democratic candidates for Congress with military-intelligence backgrounds (one more than we reported before the election), 24 won. But this includes 11 incumbents, who were all reelected. The results for the challengers, 13 out of 57 winning, less than one in four, seem poor. Simply *being* a military-intelligence veteran conveys no great electoral advantage with the American people.

But these figures conceal a sharp differentiation. About half the military-intelligence challengers were running in heavily Republican districts, had little or no money, and were largely unknown. Essentially, they were showing the flag and had no expectation of election.

Of the military-intelligence challengers running in more competitive seats, the success rate was much higher: perhaps 50 percent or more. It is notable that the party leadership gave military-intelligence candidates preferred access to a number of marginal seats likely to shift to the Democrats, or to safe Democratic districts where incumbents were retiring. And many of these candidates had huge campaign war chests, in many cases out-raising their Republican opponents.

In a few cases, however, the Democratic Party leadership failed in its efforts to manipulate the outcome. One example was the Seventh Congressional District of Michigan, the seat formerly held by Elissa Slotkin, won by Republican Tom Barrett in 2024 when Slotkin ran for the Senate.

Two high-level military-intelligence candidates ran for the Democratic nomination, Bridget Brink, former US ambassador to Ukraine, and Matt Maasdam, a Navy SEAL and former Obama military aide, each with support in the party establishment and each refusing to drop out in favor of the other. Environmental activist and former DSA member William Lawrence won the three-way contest with 43 percent of the vote, then went on to easily defeat Barrett in the general election.

As always in the analysis of American capitalist politics, it must be remembered that the corporate-controlled two-party system blocks virtually any genuine expression of mass popular sentiment, while giving the ruling class nearly unlimited flexibility to manipulate the outcome. Third-party and especially socialist candidates encounter extremely onerous obstacles even to getting their names on the ballot, let alone any semblance of press coverage or other forms of access to voters.

Electoral outcomes are subject to enormous media manipulation, but in some cases, as in the across-the-board repudiation of the Trump administration in this year's vote, the outcome gives at least a glimpse of the real political sentiments of the population.

In our analysis of the CIA Democrats, from 2018 to the present, what is most important is what it reveals about the class character and political trajectory of the Democratic Party. As we wrote before the midterm election:

> One conclusion that should be drawn from this unavoidably lengthy dissection of the 2026 version of the CIA Democrats is that the Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, unalterably committed to the defense of the worldwide and domestic interests of the financial oligarchy. It cannot be pushed to the left, let alone transformed into a party of the working class...
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> No one should be misled by the fife-and-drum corps of "democratic socialists" at the head of the column. The real content of the Democratic Party is indicated by the army of military-intelligence candidates marching behind them.

This analysis only underscores the necessity for the working class to break with the Democratic Party and build its own independent revolutionary party based on a socialist and internationalist program.

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